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since even the most novel activities eventually become routine or stale, it is obviously impossible for all one's hours to be animated with *sanug*. From a total time perspective, many of the villagers' activities are of course either "sanug-fully" fallow or "sanug-fully" short-lived. To a large extent, this paradox is resolved *subjectively* by the short-term time perspective of the villagers. This is the second major point to be noted about *sanug*, that is, *sanug* reflects a more generalized tendency on the part of the villagers to concern themselves with activities that require only brief time commitments or whose effects are immediately forthcoming. Bang Chaners are not an impatient people in an active, negative sense, but they do have difficulty in attending to tasks that demand from them a sense of compulsiveness or staying power. They will often drop demanding tasks right in the middle once they have recognized that the work is taking longer than originally expected. What is striking is that they will do this with apparently no sense of frustration over not having fulfilled their aims and with no regret over having wasted their time. It is as if their original purposes had simply become irrelevant, and they had gone on to other things. This is precisely the attitude, for example, surrounding the construction of the unusable road referred to earlier leading from the Minburi Highway to the Bang Chan school. After devoting considerable labor to building the high mound that would form the foundation of the road, villagers lost interest when they were unable to obtain funds for its surfacing. Since no one was ever interested in maintaining it, the road now lies in the middle of a rice field, rutted and pitted: much of the foundation has sunk back to the level of the adjacent fields. However, no villager has ever considered the road a fiasco or "folly"; it was just something done in the past and has since been forgotten. The road project might be revived in the future, but from the villagers' point of view that too is irrelevant. The point is that *sanug*, with its emphasis on novelty and diversion, is expressive of this same underlying time orientation. In the villagers' way of thinking, no activity is really worth doing unless it has the potentiality for fun.

Another expression of the villagers' concern with play, related in some respects to what will be discussed in the next section, is their preoccupation with humorous *topics* of conversation. For the most part, they enjoy hearing and telling stories with a "banana peel" twist: of a husband who is caught by his wife sleeping with another woman; of an individual who, through his failure to take heed, is cheated out of his money. Such stories of course always concern other people, not those immediately present. Too, stories that combine whimsy and the supernatural—for example, of a "super-dog" that can find buried treasure or foretell the future—elicit laughter, although often with a tinge of apprehension that the stories may be true. However, what is most impressive about these and similar stories is the amount of time given to them.

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521 522 538 The sociological context of a story-telling is probably what is most important here. Bang Chan is a community where other than cultivating the single rice crop and attending to daily household chores and religious activities, the villagers realistically have little else to do but talk to each other. This is clearly not an inevitable attribute of the peasant condition, but it is true of Bang Chan where little attention is given to such creative leisure activities as craftsmanship, music, and art, and where there is little occupational specialization. In fact, probably more time is given to gossiping than to any other single waking activity except daydreaming. Bang Chaners talk of many things, serious as well as lighthearted: the price of rice, religion, gambling, the doings of "big people," family disputes, and the like. However, by far one of the largest segments of their total conversational repertoire is given over to "funny" stories. Of course, no story is ever *exclusively* humorous in nature; all communication is inherently multidimensional, and even the funniest story has a substantive, non-humorous message. However, if stories may be judged by their behavioral effects (laughter) irrespective of their intellectual content, then the function of a major part of Bang Chan gossip is amusement.[10]

538 154 The motivations for the selection of banana peel type stories are more complex. In part, the choice seems prompted by a "there but for the grace of God go I . . . " mentality. As suggested earlier, Bang Chaners have a keenly developed sense of the possible: to them, this is a world where anything, not only the probable or the predictable, can happen. The banana peel story, with its emphasis on the painfully ludicrous and extreme, is a perfect representation of such an uncertain world. Its beauty is

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[123] [114] [126] [10] During the early stage of field work, I attempted to do systematic naturalistic observations of these gossip groups. The purpose was simply to identify the kinds of topics uppermost in the villagers' minds and the modes of interaction that most frequently developed during the sessions; it was hoped that the latter information might be related to the psychological test materials of the discussants. As a precisely designed and executed project, the effort, however, was dropped after a short time. For one thing, it was too difficult for two observers to record the *simultaneous* verbal and kinesthetic interaction of *several* people without the aid of a self-powered tape recorder and with the added burden of having to strain the material through the translation process. The task was further complicated by the fact that the membership of these groups continually changed as people would leave and enter the conversations. Also the groups would often break down into smaller sub-groups. Most important was the sheer multidimensionality of the conversation: any one utterance could simultaneously be funny, aggressive, boastful, carry practical information, etc. However, enough information was culled from these early attempts and later less ambitious ones to prompt the statements presented here. It is this writer's observation that one of the reasons behind the success of so much of the "small group" research conducted in the United States is that the groups studied have been *problem solving* or *task-oriented*, rather than simple gossip groups. The highly functional nature of the former has provided built-in constraints on the freedom of action permitted the discussants, and has made observational problems comparatively easier to deal with.

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that it is simply a "story," a description of the plight of other people, not the self. The story-teller or listener has the pleasure of a vicarious experience, but none of the pain of the real life situation. He can laugh over his good fortune in not being the person who was cheated out of his money or who was caught philandering by his wife. On the negative side, these stories also serve as a means by which the participants can express, through identification and projection, some of their own hostilities. The veil of humor provides in fact the ideal dress for hostility: one can be completely unabashed about expressing one's feelings (of wanting to steal, say, or wanting to humiliate), since what is expressed, in a form so exaggerated as to be acceptable, is simply the feeling and not the act itself. The hostility is made even more acceptable by the fact that it is projected onto the person in the story rather than referred to ego himself. In these terms, the telling of these stories probably does have something of the cathartic function cited earlier in the chapter: aggressions and hostilities that are otherwise kept under careful control are here permitted to emerge not only painlessly, but with a bit of relish. Finally, some of the laughter at these stories is probably also based on the feelings of embarrassment evoked in listeners. This is similar to the "there but for the grace of God . . ." motive but is different in that it is not based on personal identification with the person who suffers but rather on a diffuse feeling of discomfort over the expression of aggression—aggression toward anybody. There is embarrassment over things not being as they should be, over one's moral universe being temporarily out of joint. Also, the laughter is probably symptomatic of the listener's uneasiness as he becomes aware that the hostilities portrayed in the story are strikingly similar to those he himself harbors toward others. Embarrassed about his own aggressive impulses, he assuages them with laughter.

The motives for focusing on whimsical topics of conversation are less recondite and defensive than the above. Stories of the type describing "super-dogs" who find buried treasure are told because they are at the same time such outrageous and yet gentle distortions of reality. It is the juxtaposition of incongruous elements that is so appealing here. In ordinary Thai thought, for example, the dog is generally considered to be one of the most inconsequential and worthless of creatures. He is tolerated for his ability to warn of strangers and dispose of refuse, but nothing remotely approximating the feeling of "man's best friend" is associated with him. For such a lowly creature to be the sudden possessor of miraculous power is just too foolish. An elephant, monkey, or cobra perhaps, but not a dog.[11] Only "uncivilized" forest people would accept such a story. Yet, because the dog is such a familiar part of one's environment and also a living creature

[11] Doubt would exist for these creatures too, but because of their mythological and historical significance it would be somewhat tempered.

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recognition of the incongruity being portrayed; to have to explicate the way the familiar has been violated is to miss the whole point. Yet the very problem with which the anthropological investigator is characteristically faced is his unfamiliarity with the culturally implicit. His major intellectual task in fact is to make explicit that which is implicitly held by his informants. The only way to deal with this paradox is either to consider humor a special case of anthropological investigation, leave the content alone, and focus principally on forms and functions, or do a humorless exegesis and be prepared for disappointments. As indicated earlier, this writer greatly prefers the former alternative.

Why the frequency and value of the humor should be so different is difficult to say. That the villagers devote considerably more time to this mode of play and place considerably higher value on it than do most Occidentals is clear, especially from the pejorative comments of Westerners who are so disturbed by it. One possible reason may be the simple lack (compared to Occidentals) of time-consuming, functional tasks in the village; that is, given the villagers' definitions of things that have to be done during the cycle of daily activity, there is just more time available to them to be "frittered away" in amusing conversation. However, this negative explanation is at best only a partial solution since many people who have "little to do" manage to make busy work for themselves (in a diagnostic, not deprecating, sense); also, granted the fact that Bang Chaners have time to talk of many things, it does not explain why such a large portion of this time should be given over to humor. Another possible reason was indicated earlier: comedy provides an outlet for certain feelings that otherwise are denied direct expression or are a source of anxiety in the culture. The higher frequency of humor is a function of the degree of prohibition or anxiety, which in the case of some feelings—aggression, for example—is very high indeed. Since, as has probably been detected, much of the villagers' humor does revolve around aggressive situations, there is clearly some cogency to this approach. There is a third possible reason for the villagers' greater concern with humor. Humor, with its emphasis on the exaggerated, the incongruous, and unpredictable is, from a psychological point of view, essentially a form of new experience. In fact, it, and the real life situations to which it refers, are "invention" in the purest meaning of the terms: the breaking through of tried and established patterns of expectation. But people in different cultures look for their new experience, or express their inventiveness, in different ways. There is no inherent necessity (a consideration often overlooked by scholars concerned with culture change) for inventiveness to be expressed primarily through technological, economic, or sociological forms. It might well be, as Keesing has suggested (1960), that in many cultures the favoured modes for expressing the

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521 522 182 innovative impulses are recreative or aesthetic, either in content or form. Simply stated, the reason Bang Chaners may spend more time than Westerners in telling amusing stories to each other is because they feel they are gaining something new and worthwhile from the experience.

### *Politeness: A Social Cosmetic*

57 It has been previously noted that the villagers' ubiquitous politeness appears in several different forms: sometimes it is associated with a genial interest in others or a concern over their welfare and comfort; at other times it is used as a means of handling one's anxiety over the intentions of others or one's uncertainty over the nature and purpose of the relationship; and at other times, it is used as a means of impressing others or getting in their good graces. The term "social cosmetic" is used here because it embraces at one time all these varying usages. A cosmetic not only makes one appear more attractive and conceals one's blemishes, real or imagined, but permits one to deal with others more easily and comfortably. The last consideration is in part a direct consequence of the first two, that is, a person who feels he is attractive to others will in all likelihood be more relaxed in his relationships with them. However, it is probably also a product of the conventionalized, relatively explicit interactional "frame" [13] that the very wearing of the cosmetic creates. The cosmetic indicates that regardless of his basic intentions, the person will conduct himself properly and agreeably; it defines the presence of and prompts conformity to certain behavioral rituals which simplify for the participants the kinds of behavior they may express. In a sense, the cosmetic of politeness represents one of the most "civilized" modes of social interaction: it is based on a fundamental concern with structuring one's behavior (again, irrespective of intentions) so as least to disturb others and thus permit them to act in socially easy, uncomplicated ways. Further, it stresses respect for the dignity and psychological integrity of others. The actual topic of conversation or non-verbal ritual that links the participating individuals together may be either meaningful or inconsequential, but that is essentially irrelevant when compared to the fact that the respect the participants feel for each other is being communicated. In

[13] This term is somewhat akin to what Goffman (1959: 22–24), in his attempt to analyze behavior in a dramaturgical framework, calls the "setting" or the "scenic aspects" of the interactional situation. However, Goffman's terms refer explicitly to the physical layout—the furniture, decor, and the like—of the behavioral situation rather than to the psychological "setting" that is created by the behavior of the participating individuals. On the other hand, his term, "personal front," refers exclusively to the attributes of individuals, rather than to the situational definitions that they create. The term "frame" used here refers to the psychological setting which is created by the behavior of individuals and which defines for all participants the nature of the situation.

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609 Of the various forms politeness takes, its most relaxed, least contrived
574 form in the cordiality that villagers extend to newcomers. Strangers to Bang Chan are hardly swept off their feet, but once contact has been established, they are welcomed with a degree of attention far exceeding simple tolerance of their presence. People express a curious interest in them as individuals, as if somehow their presence were adding a new dimension to the lives of their hosts. In the case of many Bang Chaners, this is probably true: the lives of these villagers are sufficiently routine and insular that the appearance of a new face is identified also with the advent of a significant and new experience. Still other villagers approach the newcomer with an attitude that says in effect: "One should try to meet and know as many persons as possible. Who knows what good may come of it?" The implied meaning here is that the cursory contact may in time develop into a firm relationship of reciprocal rights and obligations, whereby person A could turn to B to borrow money, ask his help in finding a job, help sponsor his son's ordination, and vice versa. There is in this attitude a sense of gentle optimism combined with opportunism. And still other villagers, probably the majority, approach the newcomer with no self reference at all, but with the simple intention of trying to make him feel comfortable. Whatever the intention in each case, however, the dominant behavior exhibited to the newcomer is openness, amiability, and curiosity.

576 The actual expressions of conviviality are at all times simple and
574 straightforward. They involve asking the person such questions as his age,
521 place of birth, whether he is married, or whether he has yet served in the
609 monkhood. (Notice the phrasing of this last question. The polite Thai form is never whether a person has been a monk or not, but rather whether he has already been a monk or not *yet* become one. The syntax of the interrogative form assumes the good intentions of the other person.) If the individual is identified as coming from a locale with special or distinguishing characteristics, the conversation will often involve humorous allusions to the place. For example, if he is from the North, there will most likely be joking references to the beautiful women of Chiengmai; if he is from the Northeast, to the funny accent of the people of that area. If the relative statuses of visitor and host can be quickly identified (based upon age, clothes, speech patterns, and occasionally surname), the conversation may turn to topics whose very purpose is to emphasize status considerations and thus make the participants more comfortable with one another. If they

*156 difficulties (ask his father to save the family land for him; tell the aunt he did not
159 want to marry the girl she had chosen—which he could have done had he felt secure about his relatives' love for him), he politely said nothing. The net result of all of this, as indicated in the text, was a deep sense of personal inadequacy and resentment that loved ones cannot be depended on. Further, Dang had begun to treat others as he felt others had treated him.

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are social peers, the Bang Chaners would easily turn the conversation to a discussion of the technical aspects of rice farming or even gambling. The latter would likely be discussed with a social superior only after some acquaintance. On the other hand, if one were clearly the other's superior, the superior would probably talk not about the methods of rice farming but, more generally and benignly, inquire, "Is all going well with you? Is there any way I might help you?" He might even proffer some unsolicited advice or aid. The tone and theme of the conversation would be expressive largely of the superior's concern with the welfare of his new-found friend, which the latter would typically accept.

All this is usually accompanied by gentle laughter and careful attention to appropriate pronominal forms. The good host will also serve his guest rain water, and if possible, scented rain water. If opportunity and finances permit, he may even offer him a warm Coca-Cola. The youngster who will actually serve the refreshment will make sure that it is on a coaster and that his hands are in the proper ritual position when he offers the drink to the guest. Such are the ingredients from which potential friendships are made.

Although the particulars of the kind of politeness found among family and friends are different from the above, the forms are essentially the same. Villagers do not talk about the funny accents of the people who live next door to them, nor do they rush to serve scented water when a brother comes to call. But they do take pains to express respect for each other by using proper honorific and pronominal forms, by looking to the oldest competent family member for advice, by talking of subjects that are pleasant and amusing, but never threatening or embarrassing.

The avoidance of embarrassing topics—even when the airing of such topics may be crucially important or beneficial to one of the parties concerned—is one of the most pronounced facets of village social life. To a Westerner accustomed to outspokenness, the types of situations that villagers define as embarrassing and the lengths to which they will go to avoid them sometimes appear to border on the sado-masochistic. Detailed interviews with two women whose husbands had taken second wives, for example, indicate that although at the time they were deeply disturbed by their husbands' actions (primarily for economic reasons; secondarily for emotional-sexual ones) they never once even brought the subject up with their husbands. They explained that they were too *ʔaaj* (embarrassed) to do so. In neither case was this embarrassment expressive of any feeling of inadequacy on their parts (the fear of hearing their husbands say, "I took a second wife because you are not adequate"). It was prompted rather by the desire to avoid an awkward and potentially rancorous confrontation. They did not want to put anybody on the spot. (Whether such a confrontation would *actually* lead to overt rancor is almost impossible to ascertain because

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Villagers also recognize the reluctance of an individual to become involved in another person's problems on the grounds of avoiding the accusation of *actually* having caused them. They say (but again, empirical instances of this type are very hard to find) that frequently the person with good intentions is turned on by the very friend he is trying to help, for example, "Since you know so much about the broken windmill perhaps you were the one who broke it!" Both these attitudes result from a rather overinflated view of one's importance to the friend, as if the friend would be more concerned with the agent of information than with the information itself. This is not so much a confusion of means and ends as a re-identification of them. Finally, some of the villagers' reluctance is probably also due to simple indifference or laziness regarding the plight of the friend.

Other expressions of the "ʔaaj-ness" complex are more clearly altruistic than the above. Villagers explain, for example, that the reason there is never any more than one candidate for the post of hamlet or commune headman, on the rare occasions when such elections are held, is to avoid embarrassing the individuals involved. The eventual headman would be embarrassed because the presence of a competitor would suggest doubt about his competence; the candidate who lost would be embarrassed by the very fact that he lost. To avoid hurt feelings, only one candidate is presented, voted on, and elected.

We have been talking above about politeness primarily in a negative sense, that is, about the lengths to which villagers will go to *avoid* discomforting others or upsetting peaceful relationships. This aspect was stressed because its expressions represent a somewhat unique form of patterned social interaction. However, the many positive forms of the villagers' politeness to friends and kin should not be minimized: their concern with choosing topics of conversation they think will interest or entertain others; their search for opportunities to flatter them, sometimes in pseudo-mocking fashion, but more often to make them feel good; their attention to providing others with a pleasing audience—being silent, attentive, and eager when others are declaiming on a favorite subject. Of course, many times the villagers are not listening, but they try to behave as if they were. The aim here is to make others feel that what they are saying is worthwhile. An important part of this is that one almost never directly challenges the veracity or logic of the speaker's statements. If disbelief is the only appropriate response, it should be done silently. Nothing except personal pain and interpersonal tension would be gained from a direct challenge. If one feels strongly enough about the issue, which is very rare,[16] the presentation of an *alternative* view would not be inappropriate. But one

[16] The rarity of strong feelings is due to the fact that so often the very purpose of such conversations is to convey politeness and nothing more. The actual topic of conversation is simply a medium of contact, not a matter to be seriously discussed.

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front, know that it actually elicits and betrays his anxiety, but have such implicit trust in his own resources that he feels no need to alter his behavior. Simply stated: uneasiness when it occurs is accepted as a social psychological fact of life; it is not felt as a threat to the integrity of the personality.

The actual expressions of nervousness and inconsequential conversation vary considerably. Perhaps their most obvious (and justifiable) expression is when a villager, who wants to get something from another person, for example, a job, a loan, higher rent on land, is uncertain about the other's reaction and approaches him by hedging around the issue with giggles and light, irrelevant comments. This mode of behavior typically occurs when there is no history of reciprocal benefits between the parties or when a middleman cannot be used.[17] Although villagers themselves do not consider such comments "irrelevant" (probably because from a ritualistic point of view they are not), it is hard to define a detailed discussion of a person's buttons or belt buckle as anything but a kind of phatic communion. Sometimes conversations of this type will go on for twenty and thirty minutes, often branching off to include more topical interests such as the size of eggs or the calls of birds, before reaching the point. Frequently they never reach the point, since somewhere along the line the individual recognizes from the tone of the conversation that the other person is not in the proper mood to entertain his request; in this case, the individual will explain that he came simply "to chat." Sometimes the friend will begin to giggle uneasily (particularly if the protagonist's references to him contain an excess of flattery) as he becomes aware of the purpose of the conversation and wishes to evade facing the ultimate issue. Very often, even when the final request comes out, he can avoid it simply by giggling. Under such circumstances a giggle is crucially communicative: it is the person's polite substitute for "No," or "Let us bring this particular topic of conversation to an end." Giggling is a wonderfully effective way of carrying on a "conversation" (for those who can read its "vocabulary") because one can so readily convey his refusal, wariness, and even hostility while at all times maintaining the illusion of friendliness. It is precisely because the villagers' giggling frequently rests on such devious attitudes that it appears

[17] The *quid pro quo* basis of the former would permit a considerably more direct approach. It is not difficult to be frank with a person when both you and he realize that you are asking for an earlier obligation to be repaid or that you are creating a new one which may be called upon later when needed. Villagers are highly responsive to such obligations, often going to considerable effort and personal discomfort to meet them. A middleman, on the other hand, is used precisely to avoid the kind of delicate encounter described here. As a disinterested third party, he can be completely candid in his requests. However, for reasons of secrecy (usually when the request involves some potential competition or envy of other villagers, or perhaps some sharp-dealing) the use of a middleman may be inappropriate.

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to be somewhat nervous. Like the conversational topics mentioned above, its purpose is to maintain social contact, but at a minimal substantive level.

Other uses of giggling are less consciously purposeful than the above. Perhaps the most frequent instance of this is when villagers are talking about or responding directly to an unfortunate situation: a flood destroying the rice crop, a friend or relative dying or being beaten up, a person committing suicide. Giggling under these circumstances seems to represent several related sentiments. On the one hand, it indicates a slight feeling of embarrassment over having discovered something or talked about something which would have been better left undiscovered and undiscussed. At the same time, it is an attempt to make light of the misfortune by suggesting that the speaker and those present should not be overly pained by what they are encountering. Giggling here serves very much the same kind of function as the phrase *maj pen raj* ("it is nothing") referred to earlier; it is a means of shrugging off and denying a feeling of distress. Finally, giggling often is also a kind of ironic commentary on the human situation—not in any abstract philosophical way, but in the sense that a tragedy is so often actually felt to be a comic exposure of human hopes and intentions. A little exchange between the writer and an elderly villager perhaps best illustrates this. During one of the two rainy seasons I spent in Thailand, the rains were especially heavy in the Central Plain and destroyed the rice crop of many Bang Chan farms. As might be expected, it was a topic of considerable discussion. Paddling down the canal one morning, we met a villager who was returning from inspecting his fields, and we stopped to chat. The discussion inevitably turned to the flood, and he told us, in a completely matter-of-fact way, that he had already lost about 50 percent of his crop. He then giggled nervously over what he had said, and followed it up with, "But that person over there has lost everything." His giggles then turned into laughter as he nodded his head in an attitude of pain. Months later, when things were considerably more comfortable for the villager (as it turned out, he had lost only about 5 percent of his crop) I recalled our meeting and asked him what he thought was so funny about the flood. He did not remember, but volunteered in a nice, didactic way: "When something like a flood happens, all you can do is laugh."

Giggling is also a favored mode of dealing with the countless situations that arise in daily life that are perceived by the villagers as potentially, or imminently, embarrassing. Here giggling is a substitute for an explanation of one's actions, particularly those that are considered annoying to others. Villagers who have missed an *important* appointment (lesser ones are missed with few qualms) will tend to giggle when they finally meet the person and there is the slightest indication of the latter's displeasure.

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*125 syntax is in our culture—and except for certain ritual occasions, perhaps in all cultures—one of the basic symptoms of psychopathy. Witness the "word salads" of hebephrenic schizophrenics and the "mental lapses" of aphasics. (See White 1948: 527; Brown 1958: 293; Goldstein 1948; and Jakobson 1957.)

On occasion some of our Bang Chan informants would ignore syntactic considerations and use the sentence cues as triggering devices for their own unanchored thoughts and preoccupations: *"When I realize other people do not like me, I feel . . .* that's happened to me sometimes. When you see that other people don't like you, you should avoid them. The Lord Buddha says. . . ." And then the completion might develop into a brief lecture on morality. At other times, the cue would trigger off an autistic explosion: *"His most unattractive quality is . . .* don't have anything to do with him! He is a wicked person. I do not want to speak to him. He doesn't talk sense. One day while I was fishing, he came along and asked me to have intercourse with him. I cursed him!" (Other data on this informant indicate that she was referring to her estranged husband.) These types of [124] "ungrammatical" responses seem to derive from the social aspects of the [123] interviewing situation—the informant has a friendly listener with a willing ear and thus occasionally ignores the original definition of the SCT task to • [521] declaim on his favorite subject[2]—and also from the fact that in social discourse our Thai villagers seem to indulge more in, and have considerably greater tolerance for, autistic thought than do most Americans. That is, the villagers are more accustomed to making and hearing statements that have little apparent "objective" meaning (or in the language of psycholinguistics, "referential" meaning: Brown 1958: 315) but which are symptoms of inner states and preoccupations. The crucial point here is that a listener often does not know—or care—precisely what a speaker is talking about, but simply accepts the other person's utterances as expressions of inner, unknown concerns. Such expressions involve the leaping over of connective thought and syntactic constraints (as in the above example of the lecherous husband) or indifference to the logical currents of the discussion.[3]

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[2] Sometimes his discussions are simply expressions of phatic communion—the desire to indulge in chitchat for its own sake. (See Malinowski 1923: 315; and Hockett 1958: 585.)

[191] [3] It should be remembered that speech is not only a device for carrying on social interaction but also a mechanism for articulating one's inner preoccupations, whether or not other people understand. It is this latter use (which, incidentally, is ontogenetically the more basic: Piaget 1932; and Langer 1942: 35) about which Bang Chaners seem particularly tolerant. In general, a speaker in Bang Chan is not held very responsible for what he says. One rarely hears in the village—except from prying anthropologists—such charges as "I do not know what you are talking about. Explain yourself." For one thing, such a query would not be particularly polite; and in the villagers' scheme of things, what a person says is really his own business, re-

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Thus, in explaining why he loves one of his closest friends, a villager says:

> We love each other because we never contradict each other or disagree. That is why we love each other. If we disagreed, there would be no love. [Investigator: "It is normal sometimes even for close friends to disagree. About what kind of things do you and your close friend disagree?"] We never disagree. Only people who are drunkards and take opium disagree. That is why our friendship has lasted so long. [Investigator: "What would happen if you disagreed?"] We would not love each other, and maybe he would take revenge on me.

In another place, this same informant says of his relationship with his wife: "My wife and I never quarrel. If we quarreled, we would have to separate. There would be nothing to divide—except the children." As indicated earlier, many villagers, fearing the volatility of a quarrel, actually do separate, often even before the dispute gets going. Similarly, individuals, particularly if they are in subordinate positions, hesitate even to approach others lest they stimulate, let alone elicit, anger. Villagers will hesitate to approach others even if they are not the object, but simply a possible catalyst, of another's potential aggression: witness the cases of the land sale deal and the broken noria cited earlier. Note that in these cases it is not manifest aggression but merely the anticipation of it that inhibits villagers from initiating or maintaining interpersonal involvements.

Although villagers decline to express or to be exposed to direct aggression, they do have several indirect, if somewhat more complicated, ways of venting these feelings. Of these, the simplest is to gossip nastily *about* people. The frequency of this characteristic peasant activity is considerable in the village: in fact, an uncharitable observer might, on the basis of Bang Chan, just as readily entitle a book about Thailand *Land of Gossip* as *Land of Smiles*. However, the very frequency of gossip seems to mitigate its intensity or effect. Villagers are so accustomed to it that it is almost a *way* of talking, a style of speech. And as is the case with much village speech, villagers listen to, but do not necessarily believe, the nasty things one person might say about another. Also, excepting those cases where a person's complaints are either realistic or justifiable, people are just as likely to listen to an individual's gossip for what it says about him as for what it says about the person whom he is criticizing. None of this is to suggest that the person gossiping does not attain release, or that the person about whom he is gossiping, *if* he found out, would not be hurt or peeved. Rather, it is the situation in which the hostility is expressed that mitigates its effect.

Less frequent and more painful than the above are the formal, almost